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ABSTRACT

The importance of higher education for people of color who will soon make up one third of the U.S. population, is emphasized from the point of view of the Aetna Life & Casualty Foundation. Although the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s changed the course of history and people of color were offered access to higher education, something went wrong. The promise of the 1960s and 1970s diminished to the point where there is now declining participation and a tragic retention rate. Also, in the 1980s, the federal government backpedaled on affirmative action. Now not enough people of color are enrolling in college and even fewer are graduating. The gaps between minority groups and the majority population persist or are widening in education, employment, income, health, longevity, and other measures of well-being. If these disparities continue, the nation may suffer a lower standard of living, intensified social conflict, declining ability to compete in the world market, faltering economy, and endangered national security. American business and industry needs a pool of well educated and trained employees, many of whom will be minorities. A partnership between education and business is important but not enough. Government must also play a stronger role. Two of the steps Aetna has taken are (1) working with the public schools in Hartford, Connecticut to start an enrichment program for seventh graders and their parents; and (2) awarding a 3-year grant to a university to increase the enrollment of black students in graduate school. (SM)

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The Corporate Stake in Educating One Third of a Nation

Remarks by Sanford Cloud Jr.,
Vice President, Ætna Life & Casualty

Delivered at a Conference on
Minorities in Higher Education
Washington, D.C., July 1988

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Sanford Cloud, Jr. is Vice President of Corporate Public Involvement at Ætna Life & Casualty, and Vice President and Executive Director of the Ætna Life & Casualty Foundation, Inc.

These remarks were delivered in July 1988 at a conference, Minorities in Higher Education, held in Washington, D.C. and sponsored by the American Council on Education and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities. The conference was supported by a grant from the Ætna Life & Casualty Foundation.

Increasing both college participation and graduation of people of color is what our higher education program is all about at the Ætna Life & Casualty Foundation. That is why we are so pleased to be sponsoring this conference, and why I'm grateful for the opportunity to speak to you today.

America has always been a nation of doers. We have accomplished more, in a shorter period of time, than any people in history. But for many Americans, the excitement and anticipation of doing, of accomplishing, of achieving a goal, have never been realized. Their dreams and aspirations remain unfulfilled. And for some, the flame that sparked those dreams has burned out completely — leaving only the ashes of despair.

There are people here today who took part in the inspiring days of the civil rights movement in the 1950s and '60s. What you did then changed the course of history. You made the American dream a reality for a group of Americans who had been excluded — by law and by discrimination — from participating in many of the rights guaranteed by the Constitution.

Those were incredible times. Barriers came tumbling down. People of color — and I will use that phrase often this afternoon in lieu of "minori-

ties" — gained access to many of the fruits of the American dream that had previously been denied them. One of the greatest victories was in the area of higher education. The state universities of the south accepted blacks for the first time on all their campuses. Other universities and colleges that had no formal barriers to minority students, but which practiced de facto segregation nevertheless, began recruiting and admitting non-whites in larger numbers. Blacks, Hispanics, American Indians and Asians were seen in increasing numbers at graduation ceremonies at places like Yale, Ole Miss, Stanford, Duke, Alabama — in short, on virtually every campus in this country.

The statistics supported what our eyes already told us was happening. There was a dramatic increase in both enrollments and in the number of minority students going on to receive baccalaureate degrees. For the first time in our history there were more blacks enrolling in the traditionally white colleges than in the historically black colleges and universities.

Through education, people of color were on a path to full participation in this society.

But then something went wrong. And here we are today, in our nation's capital, talking about another failure to educate minorities. The great promise of the '60s and '70s has diminished to the point where we are now faced with declining participation and a retention rate that is more tragic than it is embarrassing.

What happened? We grew complacent. We assumed that the progress made had built up enough momentum that no further efforts were needed. But we were wrong.

Also, in the 1980s the federal government back-pedaled on affirmative action. And it was wrong.

Now I'm sure every administrator and faculty member in this room has a strong commitment to increasing minority participation on your campus. You are all to be complimented for that commitment, but good intentions are only a starting point.

The key question is: who will make it happen? Long-range strategies and plans of development — however well thought out — are useless if your leadership lacks the determination to follow through.

The great promise of the '60s and '70s has diminished to the point where we are now faced with declining participation and a retention rate that is more tragic than it is embarrassing.

The challenge you face is formidable. The statistical evidence is clear — not enough people of color are enrolling in college and even fewer are graduating.

Let me share with you some Census Bureau statistics to illustrate my point. In 1976, of high school graduates between the ages of 18 and 24, 33% of the whites, 33.5% of the blacks and 36% of the Hispanics were in college. Ten years later, in 1985, the figures for white high school graduates were virtually unchanged at 34%. Yet only 26% of black high school graduates and only 27% of Hispanic high school graduates were in college.

All of us, I hope, would agree that including people of color as full and equal partners in all aspects of our national life is the right thing to do. But developing this diverse set of human resources is also the prudent thing to do—for you, for Ætna, and for employers across the country. If we don't, we could end up with half empty classrooms, factories and offices.

During those ten years, people of color lost substantial ground.

Also, racial confrontation has increased on college campuses recently, making us question if a new generation of violence and intolerance is upon us. How do we as a society, as institutions, as individuals, deal with these ills?

I assure you that the colleges and universities of America are not in this alone. The demographics are the same for those of us in the business world as they are for educators. A commission made up of distinguished Americans, established last fall by one of our host organizations, the American Council on Education, recently issued a report "One Third of a Nation." The report, as I'm sure you know, pointed out that by the end of this century people of color will make up one third of the population of the United States and they will provide more than one third of the net additions to the work force. This conference — Educating One Third of a Nation — is one of the follow-up activities to that report.

The report states that gaps between minority groups and the majority population persist or are widening in education, employment, income, health, longevity and other measures of well-being.

If these disparities continue, the commission predicts that "the nation will suffer a lower standard of living, social conflict will intensify, our ability to compete in world markets will decline, our economy will falter, and our national security will be endangered."

Frank Rhodes, president of Cornell University and chairman of the commission, said that bringing minorities into the mainstream of American life is a matter of basic social justice. He also called it a matter of national survival.

Ætna Life & Casualty and other businesses share President Rhodes' deep concern. Our reasons for wanting to help solve this problem are not entirely altruistic. All of us, I hope, would agree that including people of color as full and equal partners in all aspects of our national life is the right thing to do. But developing this diverse set of human resources is also the prudent thing to do — for you, for Ætna,and for employers across the country. If we don't, we could end up with half empty classrooms, factories and offices.

American business and industry needs a pool of well educated and well trained employees, many of whom will be minorities, to fill jobs so that it may continue to prosper as a business enterprise.

Every member of a minority group is also a potential customer. But if they do not share in the prosperity of the nation, they have little potential as customers.

The pragmatic aspect of this situation has not gone unnoticed by colleges either. Like it or not, all of you must also adhere to a bottom line. A diminishing pool of white high school seniors and declining tuition revenues have spurred a number of colleges to create strategies to attract and retain students of color.

A partnership between education and business, however, is not enough. Government must also play a stronger role, especially in creating and supporting equitable educational opportunities. In the mid-1980s the administration shifted its view of the role government should play in financing higher education. Students, parents and you — the colleges and universities — were all told you weren't doing enough, that you had to make greater sacrifices. For the middle class, those sacrifices have been made. For the poor, there was never room for sacrifice in the first place.

In just six months we will have a new president. With the transfer of power comes a new opportunity for us in this room and others in the country who believe in educational equity. If the president asked my views on educational policy in the next administration, I would offer three recommendations:

... Mr. President, restore some common sense and balance to college financial aid by granting more money to disadvantaged kids than you require them to borrow.

First, Mr. President, pick an education secretary who believes in educational equity.

Second, Mr. President, with your new education secretary, get a handle on the size of this crisis and respond in kind with a scope and force that only the federal government can summon.

And third, while you're at it Mr. President, restore some common sense and balance to college financial aid by granting more money to disadvantaged kids than you require them to borrow.

But there are many things that colleges can do right now to improve minority initiatives and programs. During this conference you have been hearing detailed reports of the success stories of some of the institutions represented here, but let me mention, very briefly, a few other areas for you to consider:

Look to the example of the historically black colleges and universities, and learn from them. They have been dealing successfully for decades with the challenges you have gathered at this conference to discuss.

Many of the black leaders in America today — in education, law, medicine, civil rights and business — trace their educational roots to black institutions. These colleges have a successful experience dealing with students born in poverty and with those who are not sufficiently prepared to meet the challenges of the college classroom. Out of necessity, they have developed programs to deal with remedial education — programs that have been responsible for a remarkably high retention rate.

In 1985, for example, black colleges awarded 34% of all degrees earned by black graduates, although they enrolled only 18% of the students.

My friends, we've had it easy until now. You've had a steady flow of freshmen; we've had a steady flow of workers. But that's all changing. As business can't be insulated any more, neither can higher education.

In the area of recruiting, I urge all of you to look beyond the "hot" students, those in the top 10% of their class.

Look also at the solid students who get B's and C's. You don't disregard white students in these groups. They are enrolled and educated, and most graduate. Students of color deserve no less. This nation won't achieve equal representation without the full participation of minorities at all levels of achievement and at all institutions.

Your football and basketball coaches have no trouble finding their way to inner-city high schools in Philadelphia, Chicago and Oakland. There are many other students there besides the top athletes. Go find them!

There are many other things that some schools are already doing:

- Consider summer residential programs for both promising and at risk high school students;

- Urge high school guidance counselors to encourage minority students to enroll in college prep courses;

- Begin enrichment programs for middle and high school students in your community.

The only limits to what you can accomplish are those you impose on yourself.

Your football and basketball coaches have no trouble finding their way to inner-city high schools in Philadelphia, Chicago and Oakland. There are many other students there besides the top athletes. Go find them!

Colleges must also learn how to tap the corporate pipeline for funding and other kinds of support. Before you do, make sure you're fully committed, because the task won't be easy. It takes support up and down and across the institution.

But I assure you, you don't have to lower your standards to have minorities represented in your student bodies. You just have to work a little harder at the front end. It is an attainable goal.

Ætna Life & Casualty is only one of hundreds of corporations willing to make a significant investment in the future of our society.

Let me just mention two examples of Ætna programs:

• Working with the public schools in Hartford, in 1984 we started "Saturday Academy" — an enrichment program for 7th graders and their parents. Its 400 graduates are very excited about learning and see a purpose to their education.

• The Foundation awarded a three-year grant to Xavier University of Louisiana, to increase the enrollment of black students in graduate school. And allow me for a moment to share my pride in the first-year results of this program — over 50 seniors in the "Gradstar" program have been accepted into graduate and professional schools this year, more than triple last year's number.

Now, I don't want you to all line up for grant applications after I finish speaking, but I urge you to forge relationships with corporations and businesses in your area. Target one or two companies which show the strongest commitment to minorities through both their community involvement and their hiring and promotion records. I promise you they'll be receptive.

It is easy to identify reasons why colleges fall short in recruiting and retaining minorities. Chief among them are the charges that most minority students are poorly prepared in high school and don't meet basic admission standards.

But I assure you, you don't have to lower your standards to have minorities represented in your student bodies. You just have to work a little harder at the front end. It is an attainable goal, and I'd like to share with you the words of Pamela Christoffel, written in 1986 for a College Board report, to help you find the way.

"It is not simply a matter of finding the financial resources," she wrote. "It is more an issue of institutional reform — a willingness to provide the student services in tune with the student needs, hire the faculty and staff, reform the teaching and the curriculum, and develop an institutional environment in which all students, regardless of background, can flourish."

Let me close by sharing a story with you about working harder at the front end. There is a young woman in Ætna Life & Casualty's Houston office who came to us two years ago as a high school junior. She was failing many of her courses. She saw no point to her education and was about to drop out.

Her school counselor selected her and two other juniors for an enriched work-study program at Ætna. The young woman found a professional working environment, adults who cared, and a reason to stay in school. She graduated from Sam Houston High School in 1987, and became a full-time employee. This February she was named Employee of the Month in our Houston office. And now, she's thinking about college.

Additional information on Minorities in Higher Education is available from The American Council on Education, One Dupont Circle, Washington, D.C. 20036.

Additional information on Ætna education programs is available from Richard J. Wackenreuter, Program Officer, Ætna Life & Casualty Foundation, 151 Farmington Ave., A105, Hartford, CT 06156.

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